

Letter from Taizé

Living the Council of Youth

October 1974

So it has come, the opening day of the Council of Youth, the day when we all wished to say "open" : open yourself to understand all that the other is ; open yourself to understand everything of every person, each one formed of the same stuff as yourself, and like you, a person searching, struggling, creating, praying.

So that day has come, after a long time of waiting, time lived in common searching and all the tensions which that supposes. And after all, what has predominated has been the trust of love.

Now, never alone, but together with very many across the whole world, we are called to live beyond every hope, becoming people of superabundance, ready even to die of loving.

Roger, your brother

THE OPENING OF THE COUNCIL OF YOUTH

More than 100 countries were represented, with tens of thousands who gathered at Taizé to take part in the opening of the Council of Youth, from August 30th to September 1st.

The celebrations of the opening were held in six enormous circus tents, grouped like the petals of a flower. In the course of four celebrations, a combination of the usual liturgy of Taizé, together with other forms from many different countries, enabled us to express all the experiences of four and a half years' preparation and also what we shall attempt to achieve during the actual Council of Youth.

All four celebrations underlined in many different ways the fundamental aim of the Council of Youth : *unity between struggle and contemplation, prayer and involvement with others.*

The first, on the Friday evening, set the tone : a *prayer for the people of the whole world* took the form of a long intercession in which the central concerns were the peoples living in distant countries (Korea, Japan), in hardship (Vietnam, Bangla Desh, Palestine, the Sahel, Chili, certain East European countries), or as ignored minorities (Indians of North and South America, Australian aborigines, etc.). Each time, the prayer was expressed by young people from the country in question, in their own language.

The second celebration, on Saturday morning, *those poor, those oppressed*, brought everyone into the presence of some of the greatest sufferings in the present-day world by the words of twelve young people — amongst them a Filipino, a worker from Germany, young people from Senegal, a Brazilian girl, a young French "social misfit"

a girl from Rhodesia. And this same concern was then reflected in the liturgy as a procession of the Cross wound its way through the crowds beneath the six huge tents. This was followed by a long silence, introduced by a youth who explained, "Here among us there are others who would be taking too great a risk if they were to speak. To say nothing of those who are not entitled to leave their country to be with us here. In communion with all of them we shall now stay in silence."

In conclusion, Br. Roger announced his coming visit to Chili :

"Young people have suggested strong things to me. I am asked to go to places where the situation is grave, to go either accompanied by young people or on my own, depending on the situation in each case.

Spontaneously, the answer I give to myself is that I am a man not simply without any power, poor in his means, but also dominated by the conviction that I must stay in Taizé the maximum possible, so as to listen constantly to young people (and also those not so young) in order to try to come to complete understanding in these personal encounters.

But seeing the insistence shown, I realized that, upheld by many of you, the moment has come to respond to this call.

But how to choose? Where to go first?

The country I shall visit will be Chili.

I shall go to Chili to listen, to pray, to seek to understand, with the trust of love, both the poor and those in whom I admire the total gift of their lives."

The third celebration, on Saturday evening, signs of resurrection, led up to the lighting of little candles, which everyone held, as the Gospel of the Beatitudes was read.

Nine young people expressed their hopes for the Church of tomorrow, a Church living according to the spirit of the Beatitudes : a girl from Portugal, a peasant from Paraguay, a youth from North-East Brazil, another from Zaïre, an Italian girl, an Indian...

During the whole of that night, the Church of Reconciliation was filled, as thousands of young people came to pray a while in silence, in communion with all those reduced to silence in the world.

Sunday morning brought the fourth celebration, *kindling fire on the earth*. First, Joseph from Zaïre read out the text of the "*Letter to the people of God*", which from now on will become one of the bases on which the whole of the Council of Youth will grow (text p. 7-10). Then young people from different continents went on to explain how we were going to begin living the Council of Youth (the text that follows). Finally Brother Roger read passages from a letter which is complementary to the "*Letter to the people of God*"; addressed to each person individually, it is entitled "*Living beyond every hope*". There is not enough space for this to be printed now, it will appear in the next "*Letter from Taizé*", but you can already obtain copies of "*Living beyond every hope*" by simply writing to Taizé.

TO BEGIN LIVING THE COUNCIL OF YOUTH

In living the Council of Youth, the "*Letter to the people of God*" and Brother Roger's "*Living beyond every hope*" are complementary, they cannot be dissociated :

"If we are actively involved, we know that we cannot demand anything exacting of others unless we ourselves stake everything", stresses the "*Letter to the people of*

God". And in "Living beyond every hope" ways are indicated leading towards this. Br. Roger addresses this letter to *"those who long to shape their whole lives in communion with Christ who is love"*, and who seek *"to rely for an entire life-time on a small number of essential values — a few simple realities"*.

It will be no real help, as we advance, to have a whole host of texts. We discovered this during the preparation of the Council of Youth : the few phrases of what we called the "joyful news" at Easter 1970 were enough for us to refer to during four and a half years. Likewise for the actual Council of Youth : if we set out to live whatever we have grasped in the "Letter to the people of God" and "Living beyond every hope", then we shall go a very long way together.

In very diverse situations

Such is the new stage we are now embarked on : *an anticipation everywhere of a sharing community, an anticipation everywhere of a people of the Beatitudes.*

We live in very varying situations. No-one can undertake more than he or she has understood. What matters is that it be put into practice, whatever it is, very rapidly, in the local context.

For some, the stress will lie on an unwavering commitment to struggle for a change in the structures of the society they live in.

Someone else may see more a call to share with those most oppressed.

Others may be brought to something very practical. For instance, in the post-industrial societies of the North, one human group which is very neglected is the old. Some are left entirely on their own, others are institutionalised in homes. But supposing that certain families were ready to welcome an old person, to live together, that demands a great deal from those concerned. And Moiz, explaining

this during the opening of the Council of Youth, went on to say, "in India we do not have the same question of old people, because our families do not abandon people who grow old".

Some others may come to decide, once and for all, never to capitalize money or goods in life.

Someone else may give up certain privileges.

For others it may involve giving their whole existence in a hidden life of prayer.

And as Moiz said, some people will doubtless try to live all of these things.

With the whole People of God

Such is the new stage we are now embarked on : If we want to anticipate a sharing community, if we want to anticipate a people of the beatitudes, *we shall not be able to do it just with young people, but attentive to the intuitions of the whole people of God.* For that, everyone needs to find a way of living in depth, hidden at the heart of God's People. Sharing the life and struggles of all, young and adult, children and old people, particularly those most oppressed.

Searching with all of them, without segregation. Going quickly to share with others the "Letter to the people of God", or "Living beyond every hope", as the case demands. Reading them together, visiting others, creating new circles of communion.

Bringing into being, in this coming period, all over the place, a reality of hidden prayer ; people on their own or coming together in small, always provisional groups praying with the people of God, and as much as possible in the places where it prays.

And none of this "in the name of the Council of Youth" but rather in the name of the "people of the Beatitudes"

(continued on page 11)

LETTER TO THE PEOPLE OF GOD

We have been born into a world which for most people is not a place to live in. A large part of mankind is exploited by a minority enjoying intolerable privileges. Many police-states exist to protect the powerful. Multi-national companies impose their own laws. Profit and money rule. Those in power almost never pay attention to those who are voice-less.

And the people of God ? What way of liberation is it opening ? It cannot avoid the question.

When the very first christians found themselves faced with a question without a solution, when they were on the point of dividing, they decided to gather in council. We remembered them at Easter 1970, when we were seeking answers for our own age. And we opted, not for a forum of ideas, not for conferences, but for a Council of Youth ; that is to say, a reality that gathers together youth from every land, committing us unambiguously on account of Christ and the Gospel.

At the heart of the Council of Youth is the risen Christ. We celebrate him, present in the eucharist, alive in the Church, hidden in man our brother.

In the course of four and a half years of preparation, we have made unceasing visits to one another. We have crossed the world in every direction, even though the means at our disposal were slight. In certain localities, the political circumstances have led us through grave situations.

Gradually, a common awareness has emerged. It has been more particularly shaped by the voices of those among us who are living under subjection, and oppression, or who are reduced to silence.

And today we are sure : the risen Christ is preparing his people to become at one and the same time a contemplative people, thirsting for God ; a people of justice, living the struggle of men and peoples exploited ; a people of communion, where the non-believer also finds a creative place.

We are part and parcel involved with this people. That is why we are addressing it this letter, so as to share the concerns which are ours, and the expectations which are consuming us.

Numerous Churches, in the southern hemisphere as in the northern, are spied on, interfered with, and even persecuted. Certain of them show that without any bonds with political powers, without means of power, without wealth, the Church can experience a new birth, can become a force of liberation for humanity and radiate God.

Another part of the people of God, in the northern hemisphere as in the southern, compromises with inequality. Christians as individuals and many Church institutions have capitalized their goods, accumulating vast wealth in money, land, buildings, investments. There are lands where the Churches remain connected to the political or financial power structures. They draw on their superfluous wealth to give away large sums in development aid, but still make no change in their own structures. Church institutions acquire highly efficient means of accomplishing their

mission, of running their activities and bringing together their committees. But many discover that gradually life vanishes, leaving the institutions to turn over empty. The Churches are more and more forsaken by people of our time. What they say is losing its credibility.

Whereas the christians of the first period shared all they had. They gathered day by day to pray together. They lived in joy and simplicity. So they were recognized.

During the last years of preparation for the Council of Youth, in the extreme diversity of suggestions made, these are the intuitions which stand out above all the rest and to which we shall consecrate the first period of the Council of Youth :

Church, what do you say of your future ?

Are you going to give up the means of power, the compromises with political and financial power ?

Are you going to surrender your privileges, stop capitalizing ? Are you at last going to become a "universal community of sharing", a community finally reconciled, a place of communion and friendship for the whole of humanity ?

In each locality and over the whole world, are you in this way going to become the seeds of a society without class and where none have privileges, without domination of one person by another, of one people by another ?

Church, what do you say of your future ?

Are you going to become the "people of the beatitudes", having no security other than Christ, a people poor, contemplative, creating peace, bearing joy and a liberating festival for mankind, ready even to be persecuted for justice ?

If we are actively involved in this, we know that we cannot demand anything exacting of others unless we ourselves stake everything. What do we have to fear ? Christ says, "I came to kindle fire on the earth, and how I long for it to burn !" We shall dare to live the Council of Youth as an anticipation of all that we want. We shall dare to commit ourselves, together and to the point of no return, to living beyond hope, letting the spirit of the beatitudes come springing up in the people of God, being leaven of a society without class and where none have privileges.

We are addressing this first letter to the people of God, written on our hearts, so as to share what burns us.

Opening of the Council of Youth
Taizé, 1 September 1974

without there being any specific "Council of Youth groups", so as not to create a new movement.

So, as these small groups where people pray, struggle, create and search come into being, they will not be termed "cells". Cells were a thing belonging to the preparation. So as to be leaven in the dough, such groups must be formed within the context of the People of God. And trying to form "Council of Youth groups", or "Taizé groups", would be just an easy way of avoiding the real issues. Rather, seeing the local context and setting out together to live something in it, creating around the human poverty of the individuals involved and taking a name related to the immediate situation.

"Conciliar meetings"

We shall build together in "conciliar meetings" which will be held regularly, either in Taizé for Europe, or in various places on the other continents which will be decided on and announced progressively.

Gradually, as what people are living in many places is brought together during these "conciliar meetings", the stages of our march will appear and they will be summed up once or twice each year.

At Taizé, several "European conciliar meetings" can already be announced, one for Easter 1975 and one or two others during the summer months. And of course, besides these "conciliar meetings" whose dates will be announced in advance, young people will continue to be welcomed at Taizé all through the year.

As for the other continents, the opening of the Council of Youth will unfold in a series of celebrations of many varied forms and expressions, according to the lands involved and the possibilities which people have of moving between countries. With the political situation of certain countries, it will at times be a matter of simple visits.

Each celebration will express the diverse commitments of the people of God, given the local reality in which the celebration takes place.

At the heart of every celebration, there will be the risen Christ. As a sign of the world-wide nature of what we are living, in the coming months young people of various continents will set out from Taizé to go and join with others in order to share together in these celebrations. The starting point will be in Latin America. The exact localities will be announced during the year.

So that it can be an anticipation of one of the various realities of tomorrow's Church, the Council of Youth will move forward without capital, with no reserve funds, financing itself. Its communications-channels will be kept to the strict minimum necessary, and certain of them have already taken shape during the period of preparation.

Already other questions...

To sum up briefly, *all our efforts will be borne along by the desire to be leaven hidden in the People of God.*

Then after a time, when we have lived in this way at the heart of God's people and shared with one another what we have been living during the "conciliar meetings" a number of young people will be made available for visits with Church leaders. They will tackle together the questions of the irreversible steps which have to be taken if there is to be a rebirth of the people of God going in the directions of the letter we have now addressed to all the people of God.

And already we are surrounded by other questions which must soon be taken up in the Council of Youth :
What common quest can there be for believers and non-believers together ?

What economic and political ways are there of obtaining for every country its rightful share in the world's resources ?

What can we do to destroy racism ?

What is the role of mass-media, press and television, and what power do they exercise in the life of christians ?

What is the place in the people of God of the laity and of ordained ministry ?

What are the minimum structures for the people of God if communion and communications are to be ensured ?

To conclude, Joseph from Zaire said, the sign, the parable which we wanted to give as the opening of the Council of Youth was to gather from every land and cry out the desires burning us, and say our longing to commit our lives to the point of no return on account of Christ and the Gospel.

To ensure that this parable lived here together does not remain a memory from the past, it is now up to each one to be, in his or her own situation, a parable of life for others¹.

A springtime of the Church

At the end, Br. Roger insisted by a number of images on the role of old people in helping us move from doubt towards belief. He turned towards two old people :

One, Aniela Urbanowicz, had come from Warsaw to be at Taizé for the opening. Her husband and children died in concentration camps on account of their resistance activities during the last war. She is a column of strength upholding the faith of many people in Poland, today as in the past. Br. Roger asked her to speak, but she simply said, *'Br. Roger has just reminded us that Christ opens a way of risk and holiness. We will try to follow along it...'*

1. "Parables of Life" is the title of *Communion* n°. 6, which will soon be published, in which a number of individuals put into words the direction of their commitment.

And the other was an old peasant from North Italy, called Roncalli, his brother was John XXIII and Br. Roger spoke to him of his brother, Pope John :

"It was a very old man, John XXIII, who made it possible for a lot of people to leap over the wall of their doubts about the Church. In a private encounter we had shortly before he died, John XXIII spoke words which I refer to whenever I find myself inclined to doubt.

It is perhaps partly because of that old man, John XXIII, that we are gathered here today.

Yes, nothing to fear, we shall live something unexpected. How? No-one can tell. We shall live a spring-time of the Church, and the voice of the poor will be heard, the voice of every woman, of every man."

MANY MESSAGES

A large quantity of messages, letters and telegrams, arrived to mark the opening of the Council of Youth. And at the opening were a number of Church leaders, also bearers of messages :

Cardinal Willebrands, president in Rome of the secretariat for christian unity, brought a message from Pope Paul VI : "We wish you the joy that the risen Christ gave his disciples, the joy to which he calls all mankind. We pray the Lord to bless you and give all of you his peace."

Patriarch Dimitrios, in a letter and a telegram, assured that he was praying for the Council of Youth. He also sent metropolitan Emilianos to represent him and the synod of the Church of Constantinople.

The anglican bishop of Worcester (G.B.) read a message from the Archbishop of Canterbury : "This Council does not mean a new organisation, but it means the historic fact that in many countries throughout the world there are christian young people dedicating themselves to the worship of God in his glory and to the service of mankind in the quest of justice and brotherhood."

Rev. Philip Potter, the general secretary of the WCC was also present. "It is a great joy for me to bring the warm fraternal greetings of the WCC. The Council of Youth is a particularly important event for the ecumenical movement."

The German protestant bishop Thimme read extracts from a long letter from bishop Class, the president of the German Protestant Federation : "I see the Council of Youth as the starting point for a new process of thinking in our Churches. The Council of Youth is a sign of hope we are grateful for. It renews hope for a true ecumenical dialogue beyond enthusiasm and resignation. In its celebration of the risen Christ it bears witness to the real basis

of christian community. Its attempts to 'share everything with the whole people of God' encourage the Churches to let themselves be questioned, so as to become, as followers of Jesus Christ, signs of contradiction and of hope."

Cardinal Koenig of Vienna, *president of the Roman secretariat for non-believers* spoke these words : "I especially greet those of you who do not believe, who have lost their faith, who are atheists, or reckon themselves as such. We have the same human nature, the same aspiration towards a better world where there are no hatreds, no wars, no oppressions between races and classes, no injustices, no hardnesses, no religious persecutions. Can we not work together ? (...) I beg you not to disappoint all those many, many people for whom the opening of the Council of Youth has become a sign of hope."

Registration to be sent to : MEETINGS, 71460 - Taizé-Community, France.

Name :

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First Name :

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(with zip-code and country)

Profession : Age :

Will take part in the week from Monday to Sunday

Has already taken part in a meeting at Taizé : Yes-No

Is bringing own tent : Yes-No.

Can be part of reflexion-groups in italian — german — french — english — spanish — portuguese — dutch — swedish.

Can undertake simultaneous translation from into

Need more registration forms / Information material.

THE NEXT INTERNATIONAL MEETINGS AT TAIZÉ

Dates : You can come every week, all winter, arriving if possible for the Monday evening until the following Sunday. Meetings will especially be held from Christmas until Epiphany.

Age : 18 to 29 years old.

Lodging : In your tent or those here. Bring sleeping bags, air mattress, blankets. Certain sleeping quarters will be warmed when needed.

Costs : The Council of Youth depends on all involved for its finances. So everyone contributes as they can. The same sum represents quite different realities in affluent societies and in poor ones. Reckon with a basic cost per day (food and all) between 11 and 15 francs at least.

The different types of meetings : Week of silence — Work — Week of sharing (especially for people at Taizé for the first time) — Search groups (so as to go deeper in different kinds of questions for the Council of Youth).

In each case the whole week is lived in a district where you sleep, eat, share together, relax. This is intended to make the sharing truer, stimulating inventiveness and making each week really the reflection of the people present.

Silence and solitude : at any date young people can come and spend a few days of more intensive silence away from the others.

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